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2 September 1958

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MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT : Moral Rearmament

1. In accordance with your request we are submitting the following information on the Moral Rearmament Movement. We will be glad to provide more detailed comments on the subject if it is required.

2. Although there would be no quarrel with MRA's fundamental claim that a "change" on the part of all men to a standard of absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness, and absolute love would engender a transformation in human affairs, the calculation and self-interest with which MRA propagates its doctrines give rise to the suspicion that there is a stratum of dishonesty in the movement. Appearances of MRA groups, particularly their cleverly produced theatrical productions, are preceded by ballyhoo reminiscent of the old-time circus press agents, and claims as to the adherence or sponsorship of people in high places which are as distorted as they are presumptuous.

3. MRA makes a special effort to gain the interest of people of prominence and wealth. By offering what at first sight seems to be a simple panacea to the world's ills, the movement first extracts words of approbation from persons with sufficient name-value, then uses these to imply sponsorship and continued approval. Armed with apparent backing from people in high places, MRA adds some appeal of local application, such as a song in the language of the country being visited. Furthermore, MRA claims to be spreading its message gratis, though hosts to MRA groups the world over have found their hospitality to be costly. The origin of MRA's considerable funds is vaguely attributed to "contributions."

4. The movement has been constantly under the leadership of Frank Buchman, and has been variously known as "Buchmanism," "The Oxford Movement" (apparently an attempt to capitalize on the well-known earlier religious movement in England in the latter part of the 19th century), and "Moral Rearmament." It has been hinted, but not substantiated, that the name "Oxford Movement" suffered a fall in reputation during the nineteen-thirties, when Buchman was reputed to be close to Adolph Hitler.

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NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☒

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5. The following two paragraphs are taken from a brief analysis of MRA's world tour of the summer of 1955 with its musical play, "Vanishing Island." The points touched upon in these paragraphs would have pertinent application to any MRA trip which might be planned for Latin American areas.

6. The presentation of "The Vanishing Island" was accompanied by every effort to imply that the message of the play was sponsored by the United States, and by the leaders of practically every Asian nation. Not only the use of U.S. Air Force planes for transportation, which Asians believed indicated U.S. support, but also the effort by MRA leaders to present the crews of these planes as being part of the MRA group, was calculated to convey the idea of U.S. sponsorship. What were originally simply polite invitations on the parts of national leaders for the MRA group to visit the various Asian countries in the course of their trip were represented as sponsorship and support for MRA principles. Polite words of welcome by some national leader would be quoted as evidence of that leader's adherence to MRA views. In every country, a message from three important members of the U.S. House of Representatives, Speaker Sam Rayburn, Minority Leader Joseph W. Martin, Jr., and Majority Leader John McCormack, was read as assuring American sponsorship for the MRA trip and the message contained in its play.

7. In general, then, it may be said that "The Vanishing Island" was presented with an accompaniment of careful prior press-agentry, with a shrewd knowledge of the name-values of prominent leaders in every country, and with strong overtones wherever possible, of United States sponsorship. In the opinion of many Americans who saw the play, "The Vanishing Island" conveys an erroneous and harmful picture of western democracy, a more attractive picture of Communism, and a shallow and unscrupulous recipe for solving the differences between democracy and Communism. It is a relief, to realize that the MRA "Statesmen's Mission" and its play were directed at a very exclusive audience, most of whom were already conditioned toward MRA ideas or western associations. The general Asian public escaped contact with a special point of view which it would be alarming to think might be interpreted as officially that of the United States.

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Distribution:

Orig. & 1 - Addressee

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